

THE R&R OF RELAXATION

Why is relaxation important? How can we harness it during busy days? Relaxation is part of the energy equations of life; it is part of natural wellness! Activity of any kind requires energy, consumes energy, and there has to be some means of restoration of energy. I have assembled a list of ten words, all beginning with R, that describe what relaxation is:

<i>Rest</i>	<i>Refresh</i>
<i>Respite</i>	<i>Retreat</i>
<i>Recover</i>	<i>Relieve</i>
<i>Restore</i>	<i>Recharge</i>
<i>Reset</i>	<i>Rebalance</i>

What these words encompass is the need to balance effort and rest, for optimal well-being.

Stress is an arousal, or “gearing up” that consumes energy. The stress response, also known as the “fight-or-flight response,” activates the Sympathetic Nervous System, for an energy boost/mobilization of quick energy to respond to danger or threat. Relaxation, the opposite of stress, is a “gearing down” of energy use. The relaxation response, also known as the “rest, digest and heal” response, activates the parasympathetic (energy replenishing) nervous system.

I have learned in my long, clinical practice that it’s highly advantageous to have preplanned, relaxation responses in intervals for any busy day. This will interrupt and counter the stress response and promote optimal health.

In previous articles, I have offered various, brief relaxation techniques that can be used in even the busiest days. Even 2–3 minutes, 3–4 times a day can be crucially effective.

I’d like to offer strategies for their use here. On busy days, it is best to insert our relaxation sessions into the natural breaks (transition points) of the day: when we wake up, when we go to sleep, before each meal (reducing our stress response/ inserting a relaxation response around mealtimes greatly helps digestion), and when we get home. For best results, be in a comfortable chair. Use a lumbar support. Reduce harsh lighting. Turn the phone off. Arrange external quiet (consider foam earplugs). Avoid caffeine.

Here is a brief review of the one-minute CABIN technique:

*Close your eyes.
Adjust your posture.
Brief three slow, deep breaths.
Imagine a peaceful scene.
Nurture yourself (give yourself some soothing,
circular rubs on the back of your neck).*

Here is another one-minute technique that uses words for each inhale and exhale in a series of 5 breaths (adapted from Thich Nhat Hahn):

<i><u>Inhale:</u></i>	<i><u>Exhale:</u></i>
<i>I’m breathing in.</i>	<i>I’m breathing out.</i>
<i>Deep.</i>	<i>Slow.</i>
<i>Calm.</i>	<i>Ease.</i>
<i>Smile.</i>	<i>Release.</i>
<i>Present moment.</i>	<i>Wonderful moment.</i>

A third, one-minute technique is devoting two unrushed breaths each to feet, lower legs, upper legs, back, hands, lower arms, upper arms, shoulders, jaw, lips, eyes.

By doing the above 1–2 minute mini-breaks, 3 to 4 times in the transition points of the day, you are interrupting your Stress

Response, enlisting the Relaxation Response, and letting the list of these “R words” be part of your daily life. ■

—Namaste!

Dr. Shapiro is a career clinic physician who has utilized relaxation techniques with many of his patients.



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